

**Q&A: Sam Farr**  
***Produce Business***  
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**What was the motivation to lead the effort for a salad bar bill?**

I see this issue from two distinct sides, both child nutrition and the ag industry. It's rare that we find an issue that is an obvious win-win as the Children's Fruit and Vegetable Act.

As a Congressman and former state assemblyman and county supervisor, I've spent a lot of time in classrooms. I try to visit students as often as possible.

During those visits, I have seen what our school feeding programs are doing to our children. I occasionally visit cafeterias and see the foods they're serving. And I know something is wrong.

But I've also had the chance to see how things can be done right.

The Alisal Union School District in Salinas, Calif., is made up of 11 elementary schools, and every school has a small fruit and vegetable bar. Odd fare for young children, you might say, but these kids love the salad bar. They love choosing their own foods and talking to their friends about it.

Even some concerns like food safety and waste were addressed. Young children are comfortable using tongs and are probably cleaner than many adults, said District Superintendent Esperanza Zendejas, who also reported very low levels of waste.

Pair this with an incredible new market for growers of fruits and vegetables -- especially in their

fresh form -- and this campaign to improve the health of our school lunches is a no-brainer.

**What are some of the logistical challenges involved with getting more salad bars in schools?**

The obvious obstacle is funding. Fruit and vegetable bars, which are a proven strategy to get more kids to eat fruits and vegetables, aren't cheap. They can cost up to \$7,500. But I say that's a small investment to radically improve our children's eating habits.

The legislation also includes \$100 million for larger cafeteria equipment purchases, which will help schools that lack cafeterias or suffer from old equipment. Earlier this year the Recovery Act offered \$100 million to schools for such purchases, but was overwhelmed with \$650 million in requests.

There are other barriers, ranging from initial school surveys conducted by USDA to transportation and storage to school deliveries. My bill instructs USDA to "implement a plan to identify and remove barriers to facilitate the equitable purchase of fruits and vegetables within the procurement and distribution systems."

**When United Fresh showcased a salad bar at its Fresh Festival on Capitol Hill event in September, the reception from other lawmakers seemed very positive. How have other members of Congress reacted to this initiative?**

The response has been very positive. As I said, this is truly a win-win bill for our nation's children and our farmers. And from a political standpoint, the funding levels we're talking about are not very high for the potential results.

I held a briefing on the bill in early December and saw more 50 staff members attend. I also collected more than a dozen original cosponsors before the bill was introduced and I'm confident many more members will join the effort.

**How have nutritionists and school authorities reacted to the salad bar initiative?**

A study by Dr. Wendy Slusser, director of UCLA's Fit for Health Program, and Harvinder Sareen, Director of Clinical Programs at WellPoint, found that fruit and vegetable consumption increases significantly when fruit and vegetable bars are introduced to cafeterias.

That study, along with the growing number of schools that trying out pilot programs for fruit and vegetable bars, is quickly picking up momentum.

But seeing is always believing.

Superintendent Zendejas says almost all the children in her 11 schools go through the salad bar line before they get their hot meals, using fruits and vegetables to form the foundation of what they eat.

During the recent briefing, Dr. Slusser said, "I will never forget the first day of the salad bar program at Hooper Elementary School when I saw a third grader kissing his orange and saying it was the best day of his life."

It's experiences like those that will convince even the most hardened skeptic.

**Can you share some insights into the economic win-win this bill represents for both children and growers?**

Teaching kids to eat healthy leads to a lifetime of healthy habits. If we make the consumption of fruits and vegetables the norm, that won't change as children grow older. We need to break the cycle of fast food, and that must start at a young age. Not only will we limit the frequency of obesity and other weight-related conditions, we'll create a whole new market for the fruit and vegetable industry.

I've seen the federal government spend significant resources coming up with dietary guidelines and food pyramids, but fall short on implementing them with federal resources. The Children's Fruit and Vegetable Act will go a long way toward fixing that problem.

**What can produce industry members do to support the bill?**

The most important step is the simplest: call your Member of Congress and your Senators and ask them to become a cosponsor of this bill. It's also worth telling them to insist that fruit and vegetable provisions be included in the Child Nutrition Act reauthorization that Congress will be working on in the spring.

The more people who call, the more people who voice their approval of health meals for our schoolchildren, the more likely this bill will pass to the benefit of our entire country.